



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

11 February 2004

UZH42356.E

Uzbekistan: Availability of services that benefit the disabled (particularly those in wheelchairs) and whether there are hospitals that specialize in care for the disabled

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

In March 2002, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a governmental organization that oversees various socio-economic development projects throughout the world, published its findings on the general state of disabled persons in Uzbekistan (Japan Mar. 2002). Official estimates of the size of the disabled population put the number at 327,199 people (or 1.33 per cent of the population of Uzbekistan), but the World Health Organization maintains that the rate is approximately 10 per cent of the overall population (ibid., 6). Article One of the Law on Social Security of Disabled People in the Republic of Uzbekistan defines as disabled any person who needs assistance due to a physical or mental "problem" (ibid.).

The JICA report states that:

The Constitution and other acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan regulate all the personal, social, and economic rights of persons with disabilities. The government coordinates efforts to prevent isolation, ensure equal rights and opportunities, improve living conditions, maintain incomes, and strengthen the social security system. The foundation of the Uzbek model of reforms is strong social policy and an active role of the government in implementation of reforms to protect the disadvantaged population, including persons with disabilities. Despite general budget limitations, the government spends over 15 % of the GDP on social security yearly, which is over 40 % of all expenditures of the budget. Laws regulate social security policies that support persons with disabilities by means of providing pensions, free orthopedic and other appliances, tax exemption, employment opportunities and medical services (ibid, 5-6).

Article 39 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in force since 8 December 1992, states that those who are not able to work to earn a living are entitled to pensions and allowances which are at least as high as the officially established sustenance minimum (Uzbekistan 8 Dec. 1992). Article 40 goes on to guarantee the right of every citizen to professional medical care (ibid.). In addition, the Law on Social Security of Disabled People in the Republic of Uzbekistan, legislated on 18 November 1991, provides for the easy access of persons with disabilities to public facilities and services (including education, social security, medical treatment plus workplace and social integration) (Japan Mar. 2002, 9-10).

In practice, the government has generally not followed through with its promises of greater public access for persons with mobility impairments, although there is some wheelchair access throughout Uzbekistan (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, Sec. 5). Furthermore, *Country Reports 2002* maintains that despite the numerous laws providing for disabled Uzbeks, there was a lack of effort on behalf of the government to integrate persons with disabilities into the mainstream (ibid.). If the majority of Uzbeks have problems in areas of employment, salaries, pensions, access to decent medical care, and higher education, the difficulty is compounded for persons with disabilities (CANGO spring 2003).

The Ministry for Labour and Social Security of the Population, established in February 2001, is responsible for social security for disabled people, the implementation of social welfare programs, the management of medical, social, rehabilitation, and orthopedic services for those with disabilities (Japan Mar. 2002, 8). It also helps create special employment initiatives catering to the disabled and encouraging their integration into the broader workplace environment (ibid., 8). Similarly, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan has a mandate to ensure illness prevention and medical treatment for people with disabilities, offer rehabilitation services, establish rehabilitation, medical, and diagnostic centres, and train specialists to ensure the availability of special medical aid and disability prevention (ibid.). The central government decides the level of funding it will allocate to local governments, such as *Hokim* (local government bodies) and state management boards, so that they too can offer locally tailored programs for persons with disabilities (ibid., 9). The federal government also has an ongoing

National Development Plan, which includes a variety of programs for persons with disabilities (ibid., 10).

The Ministry of Health provides medical treatment and rehabilitation for all types of ailments in its medical institutions (ibid., 12). There are 1,050 major medical institutions in Uzbekistan (ibid.). This number includes 842 hospitals, 180 clinics, and 28 non-residential medical centres (ibid.). The National Rehabilitation Centre is the primary source of rehabilitation-related care, and it also trains specialists in the various areas of disability (ibid.). However, community-based rehabilitation programs were not widely implemented and did not seem to be part of the State Rehabilitation Program for Persons with Disabilities for 1996-2000 (ibid., 16). Other government programs included the State Program for the Medical and Social Rehabilitation of Disabled Children for 2001-2005 and the State Program to Reform the Health Care System of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ibid., 17). The state also provides full assistance to public and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which receive incentives and are tax-exempt (ibid., 19). Additional important sources of funding for state programs for people with disabilities include charities, the World Bank, UNICEF, Finland, and Germany (ibid., 20). Japan, through JICA, launched a volunteer program in Uzbekistan in 1998 (ibid.). In 2000, the US government-funded Counterpart Humanitarian Assistance Program (CHAP) donated 240 wheelchairs to Uzbekistan (Embassy 7 Dec. 2000) and in 2001 CHAP delivered \$US 102,000 in aid to the vulnerable, including the disabled, in the poor Surkhandarya Region of Uzbekistan, all part of an ongoing effort to assist the disabled (BBC 3 July 2001).

Twenty enterprises and six joint ventures produce appliances for the physically challenged, and in 1999 state agencies distributed 13,400 prosthetic and orthopedic appliances, 878 hearing aids, and 820 wheelchairs to those in need (Japan Mar. 2002, 12).

The JICA report states that the State of Uzbekistan guarantees persons with disabilities access to education and professional development, and while in general people with disabilities are encouraged to study in regular educational institutions, some study in special institutions or at home (over 3,500 children with disabilities study at home under a state sponsored program) (ibid.). Generally speaking, however, children with disabilities are segregated from other children and attend separate schools (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, sec. 5). According to Uzbek tradition, families are often encouraged to hide their disabled children (ISEC July 2000). All special education is financed by the state (Japan Mar. 2002, 12). By January 2001, approximately 18,596 children with disabilities (physically or mentally challenged) attended 84 special state-run boarding schools (ibid., 13). Another 1,100 children learn in three special professional educational institutions concerned with the occupational rehabilitation of disabled people (ibid., 15).

Uzbek law categorically prohibits discrimination toward people with disabilities, and further requires that at least 3 per cent of the positions in every company's workforce be reserved for people with disabilities (ibid.). Those disabled people who would like to start a small business are given incentives, and those enterprises where over 50 per cent of those employed are disabled are exempt from paying income taxes (ibid., 16). The disabled also have access to assistance from employment boards in finding jobs (ibid.). In 2000, there were 34,924 job openings specifically for people with disabilities, but only 2,814 were hired, the rest of the jobs having offered low wages and a poorly adapted working environment (ibid.).

With respect to social services, plans are under way to provide apartments for persons with disabilities that are geographically situated to be near the workplace, medical clinics, and transportation infrastructure (ibid., 13). Government records indicate that 2.35 per cent of the entire country's population received a disability pension and 1.08 per cent received a "person with disability social benefit" (ibid., 3). Persons with congenital disabilities and disabled children under 16 years old are entitled to a benefit equal to 100 % of a minimum wage salary, in addition to any other source of income they may have as long as they remain disabled (ibid., 14). Families where one or both parents and or children are disabled are also entitled to social benefits through the Mahhalya system (ibid.). Students with disabilities from boarding schools have the opportunity to participate in special football, free-style wrestling, volleyball, tennis, draughts, and chess championships (ibid.).

In January 2001, two prominent NGOs met at a conference held in Tashkent to discuss the various issues faced by disabled women in Uzbekistan (*Disability World* May-June 2001). The delegates came up with a resolution that called for the president and parliament to address certain problems in particular (ibid.). Among the suggestions were: giving more authority to people with disabilities in the legislative decision-making process that pertains specifically to people and women with disabilities; creating a law that guarantees the rights of children with disabilities to become fully integrated into the mainstream educational system; improving infrastructure in cities and villages to meet certain international standards; and raising pensions and state benefits for persons with disabilities to a subsistence level (ibid.).

In 2002, Uzbeks with disabilities still faced some level of discrimination from the general population (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, 5). The Centre for Social Support of Disabled People with Spinal Problems (STATUS), an Uzbek NGO that provides legal counseling to disabled persons and has a database of 1,780 persons that it monitors continuously, reported several different examples of societal discrimination (CANGO spring 2003). Among the various examples cited by the Centre were: A man with paralysis who was denied work for three years because

of his different appearance; a man suffering from polio with artificial legs and non-functioning arms who was not permitted to enter a bank because he might "scare" away customers; a man with severe neck problems in queue for gas who was almost forcibly ejected from the queue because someone thought that as a disabled person he was already lucky enough to receive a pension and did not need gas (ibid.). The Centre maintains that the principal problem faced by the disabled, especially those in wheelchairs and thus "visibly" disabled, is not their disability as such but rather the societal discrimination that they face as a result of this disability (ibid.). In order to counter the weakness and hopelessness many disabled Uzbeks feel when experiencing a discriminatory situation, the Centre has a hot line and provides legal advice so that disabled persons can increase their knowledge about their rights and thus be better equipped to defend themselves (ibid.).

The Internet Access and Training Program of the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), a non-profit organization that attempts to improve Internet access to the disabled population, states that in the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, disabled persons are viewed as a burden that society must support (IREX News n.d.). According to the organization:

Due largely to the Soviet legacy, the disabled in Central Asia are granted pensions and not possibilities In the Russian language, disabled persons are described as "invalids," a description which elicits pity and suggests a lack of social or economic value. Little effort has been given to empowering the disabled: wheelchairs are not viable options in cities dotted with stairway entrances and inoperative elevators; curb cuts are non-existent, making streets and sidewalks difficult to navigate; and education for disabled youth does little to prepare them to become productive members of society. Public transportation, which the public relies on far more heavily than do citizens in the United States, is remarkably inconvenient for disabled persons. While the people of Central Asia show great sympathy toward disabled persons, they have begun only slowly to redirect energies and resources towards fostering social integration (ibid.).

Another source corroborated the information that public transportation was inaccessible to those with difficult mobility (Disability World May-June 2001). Government institutions, stores, restaurants, offices, and other buildings are generally inaccessible to those confined to wheelchairs or crutches, as ramps and elevators are rare (CANGO spring 2003).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 3 July 2001. "US Charity Sends 102,000-dollar Aid to Poor in Southern Uzbekistan." (DIALOG)

Central Asia NGO Network (CANGO). Spring 2003. "Disabled People Against Immigration." <<http://www.cango.net.kg/news/a0005.asp>> [Accessed 28 Jan. 2004]

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2002. 31 March 2003. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18400.htm>> [Accessed 28 Jan. 2004]

Disability World. May-June 2001. No. 8. "Building Disabled Women's Skills and Leadership in Uzbekistan." <http://www.disabilityworld.org/07-08_01/women/uzbekistan.shtml> [Accessed 28 Jan. 2004]

International Research and Exchanges Board News (IREX News), Washington, DC. N.d. *Internet Access and Training Program News*. "Working to Enable All in Central Asia." <http://www.irex.org/programs/iatp/news/2002/1028_ca.asp> [Accessed 28 Jan. 2004]

International Special Education Congress (ISEC). July 2000. "Presented at ISEC 2000." <http://www.isec2000.org.uk/abstracts/papers_r/riskiniso_1.htm> [Accessed 28 Feb. 2004]

Japan. Planning and Evaluation Department, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). March 2002. *Country Profile on Disability: Republic of Uzbekistan*. <http://www.jica.go.jp/english/global/dis/pdf/uzb_eng.pdf> [Accessed 2 Feb. 2004]

Embassy of the United States of America, Tashkent. 7 December 2000. "US Provides Uzbekistan with Wheelchairs for the Disabled." <<http://www.usembassy.uz/home/index.aspx?&=&mid=216&overview=597>> [Accessed 30 Jan. 2004]

Uzbekistan. 8 December 1992. *Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan*.
<<http://www.ecostan.org/Laws/uzb/uzbekistancon.html>> [Accessed 25 Sept. 2000]

Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

Unsuccessful attempt to Contact Uzbekistan Red Crescent Society

Internet Sites, including:

Amnesty International

Christian Aid and Development Organization

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch

Médecins sans frontières

Social Security Administration, United States

United Nations

World Health Organization

Search Engine:

Google

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.